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# Throwing one's voice and speaking for others: Performative vocality and transcription in the Assemblées of the long nineteenth century

## ABSTRACT

*This article examines the role of the voice in practices of representation in nineteenth-century parliament. It asks how textual representations of vocal practices of political representation can be mobilized for the histories of politics and representation, and how such an enquiry can complicate our understanding of representation as a multifarious practice organized around speech. The article takes a particular case as its point of departure: that of the different Assemblées of nineteenth-century France, its vocal performances and the many practices of*

## KEYWORDS

articulation  
transcription  
political history  
parliament  
political speech  
representation  
political reporting  
stenography

*transcription, reporting and comment, such as those produced by an increasingly professional class of stenographers, journalists and satirists. Tracing the various ways in which representatives ventriloquized others, and were ventriloquized by different audiences and commentators, it draws attention to the acoustic aspects of parliamentary speech, and of the concept of representation itself. We focus on the representative quality of political vocality itself and also consider the practice of representing political speeches on paper (e.g. as transcripts or by journalists). Finally, and most importantly, we reflect on how the use of such representations could make the MP's voice present even where his body was not. Thinking about the French case in a wide transnational context, we argue that including extra-linguistic aspects of speech in our analyses of oratory might draw attention to the embodied practices that served to make, imagine or sometimes disrupt beliefs about national belonging – thus delving into understandings of trustworthiness and political effectiveness beyond the particular national framework. Consequently, thinking about speech with and as sound allows us to think beyond the nation or national institutions when examining the practice of modern politics, its development and the continued importance of ventriloquial imaginations and materialities in political speech.*

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As Thomas Macauley famously pointed out, government by parliament is a government by speaking. Similarly parliament is, as Mladen Dolar has noted, 'a place reserved for speech' (Dolar 2006: 110). That the representative chambers of most modern democracies offer a good place to study speech is well known, and the many studies of parliamentary rhetoric attest to the centrality of parliament in both modern and ancient cultures of speech (see, e.g. Finlayson 2017; Meisel 2001; Haapala 2016; Te Velde 2015). How such practices of speech also depend on vocal cultures, performances and experiences has not been studied to the same extent. As Christopher Reid has noted in *Imprison'd Wranglers*, the distance between us and the spoken word of the past is one 'that all readers of oratory must feel, and perhaps regret, for we cannot relieve the rhetorical event. But historians of speech can at least hope to reconstruct it' (2013: 3). Some studies on the acoustics of parliamentary spaces have shown how the chambers, as architectural spaces shot through with political decisions, have an impact on how sounds travel between representatives, thus adding an important layer of meaning to existing research on the political impact of the spatial layout and acoustics of the chambers (e.g. Cooper 2019). When Representative Fayet complained about the 'artificial deafness' that affected members at the back of the French National Assembly (Assemblée Nationale 1848a: 4), he demonstrated that the failure of sound transmission was equally essential. Others have drawn attention to other sounds that have contributed to the soundscape of political decision-making. Theo Jung (2018) has examined the role of silence in parliamentary debate and Marnix Beyen (2006) that of laughter. What is missing, however, and what we want to draw attention to in this text, is the acoustical nature of speech itself, and the role of the voice in practices of representation in nineteenth-century parliament. We

ask, in other words, how we can use textual representations of vocal practices of political representation – thus complicating our understanding of representation as a multifarious practice organized around speech.

For all its attention to rhetoric, eloquence and the content of speeches, political history has given little thought to the simple notion that, in modern parliament as much as elsewhere, speeches are produced by a human body. The practice of speaking one's opinion 'out loud' was considered crucial to parliamentary proceedings until the twentieth century (Hoegaerts 2015: 52). Tied to an individual body, the articulate and audible voice of the political representative did more than merely convey political opinion or content. It articulated his identity, made him present as a political actor in the room and underscored his individuality. As a number of anthropologists, historians and philosophers have pointed out, a long tradition connects our voice to our 'self', and for the nineteenth-century politician that self was a rational yet feeling individual (Kennedy and McCormack 2007). Or, as Steven Connor puts it in *Dumbstruck*: 'It is my voicing of my self, as the renewed and persisting action of producing myself as a vocal agent, as a producer of signs and sounds, that asserts this continuity of substance' (2003: 3). At the same time, the modern politician's voice also spins its vocal threads back to notions of collectivity. The individual MP speaks 'for' those he represents, be they members of his party, his constituents or, as many claimed, 'the people' or 'the nation'. Just as modern parliaments have retained, both in terms of their rituals and members, elements of feudal society (Crewe 2005), so too has the modern MP retained some of the practices of intercession ingrained in those older structures. In an increasingly mediatized world, however, the spoken word that the politician wielded echoed back to an audience beyond the space of representation itself.

The increasingly popular print media played an integral role in that process and in many ways supported the centrality of orality (Kreilkamp 2009). Basing our analyses mostly on written transcripts of the spoken word, we take this role of print seriously, and we connect it to the argument that scholars in sound studies have made regarding a collapse of binary distinctions between visual and auditory culture (e.g. Sterne 2003: 16; see also, e.g. Bijsterveld 2019; Brain 2015; Bergeron 2010). The sphere of politics and political history seems to have remained largely uninterested in the enduring importance of orality until quite recently. Historical practices of political speech have been examined most explicitly by Joseph Meisel (2001) and Henk Te Velde (2015) and more generally by historians of rhetoric and discourse (e.g. Ihalaïnen and Saarinen 2019; Reid 2013; D'Almeida 2001). The precision and accuracy of transcripts of speech have been scrutinized through the prism of the publicity of the debates (e.g. Gardey 2008; Coniez 2012; Sparrow 2003). Mostly, however, such studies focus on the development of print, journalism and stenography and changes in the rendering of the content of such speech. As we aim to show in this article, reframing the question of 'accuracy' in terms of sound fidelity may be a useful way to reframe some of the central questions involving the histories of political and representative speech and afford more room to the role of the voice itself in practices of representation.

We will, therefore, consider the practices of speech in the Assemblées of the nineteenth century in three sections: first, the speech by representatives in parliament; then, the transcription of parliamentary speech by a number of professionals and finally, the spread and use of these printed documents outside of the representative chambers. Throughout all three of the sections, we will disentangle the multiple ways in which speech and representation

were conceptually and performatively interlaced by critically examining moments of unconscious, imagined or strategic ventriloquism: acts of speaking through another, or claiming to speak with another's voice. Taking Steven Connor's interpretations of the embodied as well as the political quality of the ventriloquial voice as our point of departure, we explore the centrality of the spoken word in making political actors 'present' both inside and outside parliament. The nineteenth-century political voice, we argue, reverberated through different modes of representation. Through various transcripts, descriptions and discussions, the nineteenth-century MP's voice not only claimed to speak 'for' the people, ventriloquizing their will with the seemingly individual MP serving as a dummy. The voice 'thrown' by means of the MP's body was also thrown back to the people, or at least to those constituents who consumed the increasingly varied mediatized narratives of politics, which represented political speech across salons, streets and living rooms. In what follows, we will first focus on the representative quality of political vocality itself. Then, we will consider the practice of representing political speeches on paper (e.g. as transcripts or by journalists). Finally, we will reflect on how the use of such representations could make the MP's voice present even where his body was not.

### **REPRESENTATIVE(S') SPEECH: THE MP AS VENTRILOQUIST DUMMY?**

If parliament is a place for speech, we should not only pay attention to what that speech was about, but also to how it was performed, received and understood by speakers and listeners. Numerous volumes on rhetoric and eloquence have stressed the centrality of vocal practice to politics. Representative democracies share this preoccupation with other types of rule. As demonstrated by Bruce Smith, the queen's voice was central to Elizabethan monarchy (Smith 1999). Likewise, autocratic regimes are often centred around the voice of a charismatic or terrifying ruler. What sets representative democracies apart is not that they have a space reserved for speech at the heart of government, nor is it that such speech somehow carries or symbolizes the political power at the heart of the state. It is that a parliamentary system, as Bernard Manin (1995: 238) observes, is achieved through the production of collective consent after a discussion involving a multiplicity of diverse speakers. Speech itself serves as a means to make diversity, or the whole of 'the people', present.

Who is made present through such practices of speech depends on the particular imagination and organization of the democracy in question. The 'will of the people' (often imagined as a single voice, *vox populi*) is scattered among separate groups of people based on their place of residence, ideology, class background and so forth. Moreover, a number of characteristics could (and can) disqualify large segments of 'the people' resulting in a lack of enfranchisement and inability to engage in representational work. MPs active in such different systems throughout the nineteenth century were aware of the tension between the role of a national parliament aiming to achieve the 'greatest good for the greatest number', or at least what they imagined as the nation as a whole, and their own role in expressing what they identified as the will of their party, their constituents or 'their' people. Many included the expressed and silent wishes of non-voters in their practices of representation as well. Championing the well-being of women and children, for example, connected reproduction and representation and gave nineteenth-century representatives opportunities to present their constituents' needs *as* those of the nation (Vallgård et al. 2015). The claim to speak 'for' the people or to represent the

*vox populi* was a powerful rhetorical tool and could be wielded to push very particular agendas (Hoegaerts 2014; Ihalainen 2019).

Histories of democratic institutions have paid a great deal of attention to the importance of representation, its practices and its shifting meaning throughout the last two centuries. These studies have included histories of voting and suffrage (Richter 2017) as well as analyses of the rise of political parties, the role of clientelism in representative practices and studies of notions of 'belonging' among disenfranchised members of the nation (de Smaele 1999; Beyen 2014; Goodrich 2019). Speeches and speech-making have also been included in this historiography of representation, at least so far as their context and style is concerned. Histories of parliament are often disproportionately reliant on transcripts of words spoken in the chambers, whether they were taken down by clerks and published through official channels or written by journalists, satirists or other mediators. These transcripts were, we argue, more than a simple repository of practices of political representation; they did their own representative work and rendered the spoken word on paper, making it 'present' outside of its original context. The concept of representation, already a notoriously slippery one,<sup>1</sup> is therefore further complicated in this text as we broaden the scope beyond the direct actions of MPs.

We build our case regarding the relationship between the spoken word in parliament and its many representations based on a national case – that of the French parliamentary system, which is specific in its governmental structure, journalistic practices, traditions of transcription and so forth.<sup>2</sup> One of its most particular features is its semi-circular shape, the hemicycle, which directed the attention of representatives towards the tribune, which faces the benches of the assembly. Rules required that MPs request a speech-turn from the assembly president before giving their speech. Thus, the debates were articulated around the arguments presented by consecutive MPs, who in practice frequently replied to interruptions from the rest of the assembly. MPs then walked back to their benches to sit with representatives of their political group. As Marcel Gauchet ([1993] 1997: 2541) has noted, the sides of the assembly began to have a more symbolic political structure in the early nineteenth century. The density of representatives on the right or left or at the centre of the assembly became proof of political influence, which was sometimes demonstrated loudly. Nevertheless, while our main focus is the French environment, we also contribute to a growing body of research in parliamentary history that does not focus so much on national specificities or what sets parliamentarisms apart, but rather on developing a more transnational perspective. As Pasi Ihalainen notes: 'Generalizations at the European level need to be based on national cases, to be sure, but [...] Parliamentary history seems, indeed, to be moving more generally towards comparative studies – and hopefully also towards transnational parliamentary history' (2016: 20).

The sounding reality of politics offers one place to begin such transnational parliamentary histories, as does the widespread practice of publishing parliamentary debates using common, though constantly evolving, stenographic principles and techniques (see Gardey 2008). As the voices themselves have been lost, we rely on the same documents as contemporary observers did to make these voices present again. But in the absence of the requisite period ear and the cultural expectations and surroundings in which these voices were projected, we will have to rely on practices of historical contextualization to make sense of the meaning and impact of their sounds.

1. The conceptual complexity of 'representation' is beyond the scope of this text. For a recent overview of its modern conceptual history, see Hayat and Rosales (2020).
2. The analysis in this study was based on transcripts published between approximately 1820 and 1900 in *La Gazette de France*, *La Presse*, *Le Siècle*, *Le Constitutionnel* and *Le Moniteur Universel*, later known as *Le Journal Officiel* (held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France [BNF] and available through its digitized collections). This selection contains both official and non-official transcripts, and we have sought to include a variety of political backgrounds, as explained more fully in the third section of this article. For more on the role of transcripts, newspapers and the publicity of the debates in France, see Gardey (2008) and Coniez (2012). All citations from the French material have been translated into English by Ludovic Marionneau.

Speech itself in such a project of reframing ‘accuracy’ or fidelity occupies a central role in modern modes of representation. As Hanna Arendt (1958) suggests in *The Human Condition*, speech has a ‘revelatory quality’ that is intrinsically political. Speech articulates individual presence, and therefore speech politicizes the individual declaring itself – making the speaking individual a cornerstone of democratic rule. Modern parliamentary practice relies on this declaratory role of speech, in its insistence on distinguishing clearly between who can speak and who cannot at any given time, in designating places for speaking and listening, and in its stress on the necessity to declare one’s opinions ‘out loud’ – meaning that it therefore helps define the limits of democracy, which promises equality within very strict bounds (Richter 2020: 28).

At the same time, parliamentary speech claims to rise above matters of individual opinion, to afford presence not only to the individual speaker, but also to those he ‘speaks for’. When Deleuze critiqued the ‘indignity of speaking for others’, he lambasted a bourgeois understanding of the self and its presence, but he did so in opposition to the claim that the ‘dignity’ that was believed to undergird political speech was based on its ability to vocalize others’ will. This puts the nineteenth-century representative in an ambiguous position: at a time when individual independence was a highly prized quality among middle-class men, their bodies, minds and mouths were expected to act as porous borders rather than as the impenetrable fortress men of their status were otherwise expected to be (Griffin 2018). Their voices, like Arendt’s political speech, were designed to express presence, their practices of vocalization carrying a non-logocentric self (Cavarero 2005: 181). But the ‘self’ they made present was neither entirely their own nor necessarily individual. When speaking ‘for’ the nation, their constituents, their party or ‘the people’, they acted as highly polished vessels for a polyphony of voices to be thrown into the chamber. Approaching political speech as a practice of ventriloquism can therefore contribute to our understandings of representation. As Connor suggests,

to understand the operations of ventriloquism, in the larger sense of the separation of voices (and sounds) from their source, and the compensatory ascription of source to those sounds, is to go a long way towards understanding the construction and transformation of what may be called the cultural sensorium, or the system, of relations, interimplications, and exchanges between the senses.

(2000: 22)

This cultural sensorium can be considered a nexus between the senses triggering a cognitive response. Culture induces a correspondence between the sensory perceptions and experiences of individuals. Applied to our subject, ventriloquism allows us to question the complex relations between speech, transcriptions, listening, understanding and the overall co-construction of a political speech in and beyond parliament. Stenographers translated the parliamentary events, co-constructing them with the representatives at one end and with readers at the other. These three groups co-constructed common notions of accuracy and fidelity that relied on agreements about how the perceived parliamentary reality should be approached. Transcripts do not reproduce sounds or the events as they happened, but instead articulate them as a means to reaching an understanding about these objects, thereby



modelling a cultural sensorium in such a way that makes the transfer of information possible from the actual event to their target between the different actors.

## REPRESENTING THE MP'S SPEECH

This polishing process continued both during and after the moment of speech – MPs' voices, including their acoustic qualities, were co-constructed by an audience of government officials, journalists, their peers and others. The moment of speaking itself was merely one step in the creation of a representative's vocal performance. As Karin Martensen notes, the goal of early recording technology was not to 'depict vocal reality', but rather to co-construct the human voice by mediatized means (2019: 15). Whilst recording technology would not become widely available in the nineteenth century and would only be used for political voices much later (e.g. Greg Goodale 2011), a similar perspective can be employed for the work done by parliamentary clerks for the construction of MPs' voices. Like the phonograph, they helped 'make' the politician's voice by making it audible beyond its original context. The connection between transcription and recording, obvious, for example, in the appellation of new transcription methods in the nineteenth century as 'phonographic', has been noted by a number of scholars (e.g. Picker 2003; Bowles 2018; Butler 2015).

Transcripts – visual representations of speech – were thought of in terms of recordings. That did not imply, however, that they were simply a means to store a vocal performance and make it available to others – the recording always is an 'aesthetic capture' (Rée 1999; Davies 2019). Capture by shorthand was thought of in even more co-creative terms, at least by its practitioners. Daniel Morat's recent work on German stenographers describes them as self-confident professionals, proudly proclaiming their superiority over recording technology because, as professional listeners, they had acquired a 'Hör-Wissen' that defined their skill and identity (Morat 2017: 311). A similar understanding of the role of stenographers seems to have been at work elsewhere. Hippolyte Prévost, a leading French stenographer, expressed pride in fixing orators' delivery issues. Elaborating on the standard practices of taking down and editing parliamentary speech, he mentioned the need to erase the difference between 'the spoken style and the written style' (Prévost 1848: 3) and emphasized the importance of stenographically rendering the resemblance with speech (*parole*) in the transcript. If stenographers literally copied what they heard, he argued, only representatives who spoke like books would be easily readable, but 'those are not orators' (Prévost 1848: 3). He contrasted the 'unintelligent slave of the material verb', who offered a 'caricature' of speech performance through a strict notation, with the 'intelligent' stenographers, who produced a carefully processed translation of speeches into a readable form of orality or 'image of speech' (Prévost 1848: 3). The sonic aspect of speeches prevailed in such scripts.

As stenographic skills improved and the number of practitioners increased, newspapers transitioned from merely providing summaries to providing more dialogic forms of transcription. In the British Commons, stenographers reported speeches in indirect style until the late nineteenth century, using the third person and verbs in the past tense, such as 'Mr Finch admitted [...] or 'Mr O'Connell could not help remarking [...]'. The French and German reports preferred direct speech, which presented a more immersive



experience, as such speech did not constantly refer to a temporal and spatial separation between the speaking agent, the speech occurrence and the reader. Such dialogic transcriptions stressed the personal and chronological aspects of the deliberative discussion. As the French sociologist Éric Landowski (1977: 436) argues, the publication of parliamentary debates prevented the institution from appearing as a monolithic legislator exerting power unilaterally. It is in this light that the stenographic aim of ‘preserving the individuality of the orators’ speech’ (Prévost 1848: 3) and properly representing their interactions in the debates mattered. Stenographers presented the assembly in its multiplicity and underlined the unfolding principle of deliberation. In principle, they acted as a direct conduit, speaking for the representatives in the assemblies to the represented. Yet, whilst contributing to the transparency of the legislative process, they made a point of ‘artfully concealing their own traces from the readers and the orators themselves’ (Prévost 1848: 3). Modified but unauthored, transcripts purposefully appeared as the unmediated voice of the representatives in the assembly. They stood in as an anonymous body speaking to the people, or as Delphine Gardey notes, as ‘humble witnesses’ reporting on the events while suspending their own judgement (Gardey 2008: 46–47).

Stenographers developed an art of neutrality. To avoid confusion, they needed ‘intelligence in the discussed substance’, or else their report would be subject to ‘deviations’, or ‘the most terrible discrepancy’ (Prévost 1848: 3). All stenographic techniques benefitted from the same neutrality, according to Prévost, who had helped set up the recording process for the Senate. However, each newspaper still published its own transcripts in its own style and with its own interpretations. Pierre Leroux’s speech of 24 July 1849 was published the next day across twelve tightly printed columns of *Le Moniteur Universel*, while *Le Siècle* and *La Presse* shortened it to two columns (Assemblée Nationale Législative 1849a: 2–6; Assemblée Législative 1849: 4; Assemblée Nationale Législative 1849b: 2). This resulted from political differences between newspapers, as claimed, for example, by Honoré de Balzac (1843: 147), who accused journalists of moulding the assembly to fit their newspaper’s political tastes. But such criticism reduces the variety of transcripts to mere inventions and ignores the fluidity of notions of accuracy. Transcript writers strived for accuracy and wrote in good faith and according to legal demands, but still they inevitably ‘filter[ed] and select[ed] the sounds [they] hear[d],’ (Connor 2000: 17) according to their cultural sensorium.

Hippolyte Prévost reminded his readers that France had many ‘free newspapers’, the only kind that existed in England at the time, as opposed to the ‘special responsibility’ and ‘official ties’ of ‘our Moniteur Universel’ (Prévost 1848: 3). Transitioning from a contractual relationship of private stenographers into an institutionalized body of specialists made the political nature of transcripts even more obvious, as the institution clearly intended to control the fidelity of parliamentary reports. In the late 1840s, the chambers bound stenographers to civil service and published the official transcripts in *Le Moniteur Universel*. From then on, stenographers of the Assemblies spoke through the institution, even when they spoke for MPs. One definition of accuracy thus became a national standard, turning the competing definitions of other newspapers into counter-examples challenging the officially certified interpretation of the state. In the late nineteenth century, during the Third Republic, the parliamentary institutions started to communicate their official transcripts to private newspapers (Coniez 2012: 149; Gardey 2008: 53),

effectively putting an end to the counterfactual debate between the different representations of parliamentary sessions. The unique transcript, sought for its consensual fidelity, still preserved the multiplicity of actors voicing their opinions, but it reduced the deliberative polyphony of interpretations provided by the diversity of transcripts. At the same time, MPs lost part of their autonomy, as parliament reified their speeches immediately after their utterance, asserting ownership of political discourse. In other words, parliamentary deliberations became the polyphonic voice of the institution.

Establishing a sense of situation and context and a measure of the impact each orator had in the debates, reactions highlighted the mood of the assembly (laughter, shouts), noted impatience with orators (calls for a division) and recorded any challenging questions, demands or insults. The presence of these comments exposed the hierarchic sonic order in the assembly and heightened the transcripts' realism. For instance, the president, never typographically diminished with parentheses, could interrupt orators, demand quiet from the benches and rule over the sonic space of the assembly. Tolerance dictated that the other representatives could react, but not regularly interrupt the orators. Consider for example this interruption by a regular MP:

Le Citoyen Corne. [...] on which I could not exert any influence, and that I could not foresee...(interruptions.)

Le Citoyen Sarrut. Speak as a representative and not as the general prosecutor.

Le Citoyen Président. I invite the citizen Sarrut to remain silent. M. Corne speaks here in both qualities of representative of the people and general prosecutor.

(Assemblée Nationale 1848b: 6)

Reactions were tied to individuals, when identified. Other times, they were ascribed to 'a representative', but still reinstated the relationship between voice and human presence. Specifically, in the French cultural sensorium interruptions could be reported as coming 'from the left', 'from the right' or 'from the centre', metonymically representing a political group but relying on the established seating arrangements. This blending of sounds and space with the political structure of the assembly reinforced a sense of materiality emerging from the text. Anonymous interventions were also often disembodied, mentioned under the terms 'a voice' or 'voices'.

Assembly President: None of the candidates obtained an absolute majority of the votes; we will proceed to another ballot.

Diverse voices: Immediately! Immediately!

Other voices: After the Haut-Rhin! After the elections! (Aye! Aye! Nay! Nay!)

Assembly President: The assembly contains 750 members, and a mere 400 took part in the ballot. [...] You are designating a bureau for yourselves, not for the ones who will be elected.

Other voices: The elections! The elections!

On the Left: Tomorrow! – Print the report! – Tomorrow!

(Assemblée Nationale Législative 1850: 1)

Experienced ‘as enigmatic and anxiously incomplete’, these threats to parliamentary order were given spatial attributes (on the left) or quantity (one voice, diverse voices), or they even increased the impression of deliberative confusion (‘diverse voices’ followed by ‘other voices’). Dashes also indicated that the voices overlapped and interrupted one another, forming a chaotic sonic mass that text can hardly render, but merely encourage the reader to attempt to recreate. As these uncanny voices could even originate from the gallery, their mention was synonymous with parliamentary disorder. Thus, transcription practices of ‘fix[ing] and spatializ[ing], [...] by borrowing the visual power to segment and synthesize’ (Connor 2000: 17) contributed to restoring order, even if only partially.

Claims of accuracy gave transcriptions the appearance of exhaustiveness in their effort to achieve realism, but many dimensions of speech were purged by the corrective methods of stenographers, or even altogether erased. Faulty liaisons between words, for instance, were abundantly mocked:

M. Vernhette. Des protestations nombreuses *ont été-z-adressées* à l’Assemblée (hilarité prolongée).

(M. Vernhette. Numerous protestations *have been addressed* to the Assembly [prolonged hilarity]).

(Assemblée Nationale Législative 1850: 1, original emphasis)

Italics sometimes highlighted the mistake for the reader. In this case, the pronunciation of a normally non-existent ‘z’ sound, equivalent to misspelling ‘été’ as ‘étés’, caused ridicule. Moreover, details only known to those familiar with the events hid behind the repetitions of ‘interruptions’, ‘mouvement’ (‘emotion’) or ‘agitation’. The slamming of hands down on the tribune, the clattering of wooden knives and the stamping of feet by MPs, or even the ringing of the presidential bell, although not systematically described in all the transcripts, echo in many other accounts.

The official transcripts were not recorded verbatim, as Benjamin Morel has noted, but instead represented ‘the formalisation of a highly idealised and ritualised parliamentary order to guarantee the readability of the legislative process’ (2018: 178). But whilst other newspapers had more editorial freedom, they too were still culturally bound by the linguistic principles of eloquence and stenography. Beyond the occasional mistakes or the actions of specific MPs, transcripts propagated an elitist image of a perfect voice, of a proper language spoken uniformly, fluently and universally. In this respect, the transcript still belonged to ‘a culture of writing’, where ‘voices will tend increasingly to be modelled upon and to be assimilated to the condition of written words, which is to say as seemingly manipulable forms and quasi-spatial objects’ (Connor 2000: 24). Transcripts cleared voices of the sonic aspects that did not suit reigning vocal norms. The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* stated that ‘in order to speak properly, individuals must not speak with an accent’ and distinguished between ‘the educated people of the capital and the pronunciation of people from provincial France’ (1835: 15). Treatises on eloquence echoed this argument, but they also noted that orators spoke with regional accents (and therefore non-universal or national French). References to MPs’ regional accents are disclosed in other sources on parliamentary culture as well, such as in satirical newspapers, portraits and diaries. Thus, if the people delegated power to the representatives, the representatives themselves gave away their personae to the stenographers who spoke for them hereinafter – eloquently, fluently and above all properly.

## PRACTICES OF READING AND MAKING POLITICS PRESENT

Parliamentary regimes and their expression expanded through the publication of the transcripts (Gardey 2008; Coniez 2012; Saminadayar-Perrin 2007). Once recorded, the printed debates could be witnessed and discussed outside the assembly by a secondary audience outside the Palais Bourbon, so the public could vicariously sit in the assembly room. The structural elements of the assembly room, such as the benches, the tribune and the galleries, formed the backbone of the transcript. Yet the reports did not refer to these objects in detail; they were sketched broadly, to contextualize the actors within the room. The tribune was by far the most present element, being constantly mentioned, even by the orators themselves, who had 'climbed up to the tribune' to speak (Assemblée Nationale Législative 1849a: 2). The tribune was also a focal point for conflicts over turn-taking. The open space before the tribune was thus often used by MPs to demonstrate impatience with orators: 'don't give him anymore water' several members said jokingly in 1849; 'he will only stop speaking when he is too thirsty (renewed laughter)' (Assemblée Nationale Législative 1849a: 5).

To reach the tribune, ministers walked from their designated front benches at the centre of the assembly, while regular MPs travelled from their seats amongst those in their political group on the left, centre or right side in the hemicycle. These ordinary movements could become a matter of spectacle, as when Pierre-Marie Pory-Papy, an MP from Martinique, '[left] his seat at the back of the room and walk[ed] with ease to the tribune, where he [was followed] by the gazes of all his colleagues' (Assemblée Nationale 1848: 5). While the tribune could be dynamic, any noticeable activity in the gallery appeared as a disturbance, and their existence in the script as a sign of disorder, even with respect to messages thrown into the debating space (Chambre des députés 1831b: 4). Because 'the voice always requires and requisitions space' (Connor 2000: 5), these voluminous exchanges forced editors to conceal vocalizing agents and be more synthetic. Behind references to the opening and closing time, transcripts pointed to the president at his desk vocalizing these administrative rituals. In its own two-dimensional way, a transcript 'disrupted the seen space' (Connor 2000: 15) by creating a network of materiality around a limited number of structural elements. Each repetition of their presence therefore was equated with a grammatical 'there is' and helped reconstruct a functional assembly in the mind of the reader.

Beyond the disruption of space and sound mentioned by Steven Connor, the ventriloquial act additionally disrupted time. Readers did not replay the parliamentary events, but instead unpacked them from the transcript in an asymmetrical process. On 20 September 1831, Adolphe Thiers reportedly delivered a speech for 'more than one hour and a half', 'despite the extremely quick pace with which it was improvised' (Chambre des députés 1831c: 2), but no reader would have synchronized their reading with a pace only disclosed at the end of the speech. Although Hippolyte Prévost wanted to prove 'the more impetuous character of French orators' (Prévost 1848: 3), stenographers rarely provided readers with information of this type. Time was constructed administratively in the transcript, bracketed by the presidential opening and closing announcements and pauses, when the assembly was unruly or during lengthy oratories. Readers, however, could pause and skip over speakers, or repeat sentences to themselves. They had to appreciate the length of 'long interruptions', 'prolonged hilarity' and 'interruptions' themselves. In keeping with the

notion of vocal production as a recurring event (Connor 2000: 4), the dialogic sequencing of speech-turns preserved the contextual illusion of parliamentary activity as intact on paper and reinforced the sense of internal chronology and coherence in the debates.

Likewise, only relevant visual details were included in the transcript. An MP placing a manuscript on the tribune indicated a lengthy or inefficient reading of a speech. While visitors in the galleries could see the representatives, readers could only spot them through the lens of the text. The presence of MPs, their 'continuity of substance as vocal agents' (Connor 2000: 3), was unveiled via a textual reference. Stenographers deictically made MPs speak for the reader to hear, singling them out among representatives. Oratorical misfires and interruptions even reasserted the materiality of speech, the impression of orality. In these instances of meta-discourse, when the voice of the orator was too weak (*Chambre des députés* 1823: 4) or the noise around him too loud (*Chambre des députés* 1831a: 2), transcripts stressed these sonic and material elements. All this effectively transformed the assembly, as shaped in the transcript, into a 'world of pure sounds' (Connor 2000: 17).

To enter this parliamentary space, the secondary audience did not need skills to hear, but to read. The transcripts, like any recording, required a device to be played, and the embodied reader was involved in this process of replay. The stenographer's script of the session provided readers with the means to mentally animate the assembly, 'making voices appear to issue from elsewhere than their source' (Connor 2000: 14). However, this ventriloquist process was not unidirectional: neither the dummy nor the speaker was actually present in the performance. The reader had to engage in a personal reconstruction based on the stenographer's co-construction. Using stenographers' signs, they re-enacted the performances of the assembly. If readers had previously heard the MPs, they could imagine how they would have performed in a different session. The voices in the transcript were mentally crafted, sometimes based on personal experience. Once published, oratories no longer belonged to the stenographers or the orators; they gained relative autonomy within the culturally defined mental sonic space of the assembly existing in every reader.

Shrunk within the newspaper columns, the performances of the debates simultaneously extended to homes and salons and took place within parliament itself (Te Velde 2015). Transcripts were a means 'to recreate the close articulation between the space of political debate and the daily lives of citizens' (Saminadayer-Perrin 2007: 20). As detailed versions of the proceedings, they became documents about the 'brilliance' of assemblies, aiming to protect the most valuable minutes of history (Prévost 1848: 3). Whilst orators could quote performances from memory or take notes, the availability of transcripts recognized for their accuracy enabled orators to not simply refer to one another. Supported by the added authority of the records, the contextualizing process could evoke the materiality of previous events within speeches. The experience of vocalizing another individual's words was not merely personal or part of the reader's imagination, but one shared by all listeners, thanks to the authority of the transcription. It did not matter which assembly it was, what the room looked like or if it had taken place in Paris or elsewhere; the accumulation of trusted parliamentary records tied to the national parliamentary assembly made it possible to recall any previous documented parliamentary event. Thus, on 6 March 1880, in the French Senate, an orator could cite unidentified interrupters, MPs or a minister who had just spoken, but so too could he cite speeches from the 1840s by the recently deceased François

Guizot or Adolphe Thiers, for instance (Sénat 1880: 6–9). The principle of the publicity of debates reduced the discrepancy between the events and the moment they became known to the concerned citizen. This made the voice of MPs echo until it reached the people. Once recorded and archived, MPs' voices could still resonate when their bodies did not, extending a continuity of parliamentary presence that could spill over into subsequent parliaments at any moment.

Orators were often presented correcting the proofs of their speeches before their publication, improving the reactions from the audience and altering their speeches in a final attempt to exert control over the subjective experience of their performance and their public dummy figure. This switch from a personal experience to a translation for the cultural sensorium destined for a much larger audience could cause conflicts of interpretation. The minimalist rendition of the parliamentary events was necessarily incomplete, as transcripts had to adapt the material modalities to fit a two-dimensional text format. In this seemingly unmediated process, stenographers acted as intermediaries between representatives and the readers, negotiating the meaning of accuracy and fidelity via the parliamentary norms of rhetoric and political representation. The sonic physicality of speech could not be transmitted, but the impression of the material voice was preserved so that readers could lend the representatives a voice. Stressing this materiality preserved not only the content of performances, but also the deliberative objectives of parliamentary politics. The embodied voice of the MP, flighty as it may have seemed in the hemicycle, retained much of its materiality thanks to the ventriloquial nature of its mediation. Representation came full circle when citizens were made to 'speak for' the MPs, joining on a daily basis, by proxy, the political construction process.

This focus on the material and ventriloquial voice also allows us to reimagine the major role of stenographers and the mechanisms they used in the transmission of parliamentary speech. Claiming to be external to the debates, they offered regular and reliable reports on the parliamentary events and insisted that transcripts were texts belonging to the discursive system of orality. Presented as mute, transcripts demanded to be mentally heard, from the voices of the orators to the procedural rituals culturally shared with the readers, or the brief remarks by stenographers, apologizing for their own inability to hear anything over the tumult. More than a narration, transcripts, as records of the deliberations, were documents in which stenographers spoke for representatives who were made to speak for their constituents. In this political puppet show, only those representatives who sonically contributed to the debates were made present. Therefore, their voices, or their ability to disturb those of others, were their greatest assets. Yet, the parliamentary experience of the transcripts was not limited to those moments of speech delivery behind the tribune. Newspapers had limited space for the debates in their daily issues, and each printed detail was carefully selected, its inclusion meaningful. The presence of interruptions, the presidential calls to order or the disorder present in the galleries, prove that oratory was only one element of the parliamentary experience captured by stenographers.

Beyond the French case, or the British and German ones, which were here only alluded to, the relationship between MPs, stenographers and citizens was articulated in other parliamentary records through their own cultural sensoria. This focus on the material and ventriloquial nature of the political voice opens doors for new modes of international comparison and studies of transnational



transfer. The rich histories of rhetoric on which this study builds have often been closely connected to and invested in national, cultural and linguistic particularity. Histories of political rhetoric are closely tied to histories of the nation precisely because orators claimed to speak for and to that nation – often resulting in a canon of ‘great’ oratory. Including extra-linguistic aspects of speech in our analyses of oratory might draw attention to the embodied practices that served to make, imagine or sometimes disrupt beliefs about national belonging – thus delving into understandings of trustworthiness and political effectiveness beyond the particular national framework. Consequently, it may allow us to think beyond the nation or national institutions when examining the practice of modern politics, its development and the continued importance of ventriloquial imaginations and materialities in political speech.

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